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Merker gets a bite of the Apple

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By ILENE HALUSKA

If you've always wanted to be a teacher, then you just may become one.

That's how Wauconda High School Amanda Merker looked at it after learning that the Golden Apple Foundation recently named her one of 125 Golden Apple Scholars in Illinois.

"Ever since the second grade, I just wanted to be a teacher," Merker said. "I've even been that way all through high school."

A native of Island Lake, Merker, 18, officially finished her senior year at WHS in December and now is taking classes at McHenry County College. She played varsity tennis, earning most valuable player honors, enjoys Spanish and volunteers for her former second grade teacher Marci Johnson at Cotton Creek Elementary. Johnson has known Merker since Merker was seven years old.

"She does work for me and the other second grade teacher," Johnson said. Merker's volunteer time in the classroom every week includes duties such as making copies to working one-on-one with students in reading.

Merker reported that she is slated for a paid summer program at the Illinois Math and Science Academy in Aurora and then is off to Northern Illinois University in DeKalb to work on her education degree in science and math.

"I plan to teach middle school math and science," the scholar said of the "transition time" for kids not too young and not yet teens, and there is a need for middle school math and science teachers.

The national Golden Apple Foundation identifies and recruits scholars to become teachers. Part of its application process was to write six essays on topics like how she would teach ethnically diverse students and her most influential teacher. It will provide Merker with four years of financial assistance, totaling \$16,000 for tuition, internships and Golden Apple Award teacher mentors in exchange for teaching five years at an Illinois school with low-income students or with below-par test scores.